

Blogging toward Sunday

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The two aspirants to the governor's mansion in my state ran a race that often sounded more like an old-fashioned prayer meeting than a political campaign. Both seem convinced that the key to victory lay in demonstrating that one was more Christian than the other. As a result, we were blessed by an outpouring of political ads that were more hagiographical than enlightening, more testimony than serious political discourse.

What might have happened if our two candidates had taken seriously the rule of God made known in a crucified Jesus?

For that matter, what would happen if we were to do the same? What if we were to turn our attention to what John Howard Yoder referred to as "the politics of Jesus"?

Luke testifies—how's that for a campaign ad?—that after Jesus was thoroughly humiliated, he was hung on a cross alongside two convicted criminals. One of the criminals called for him to show his messianic authority by a display of saving power that would work for all three of them. But the other criminal turned to Jesus and cried out for mercy, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom!"

We remember and hope, through the Word and the Eucharist, that because Jesus did not save himself, he is able to save others, including us, in the larger sweep of God's purpose to redeem and perfect the whole creation. Through the testimony of Luke's Gospel we see, know and participate in the rule of God through the presence of the Spirit indwelling the church.

Recently I have doing a lot of talking with my students about the relationship between means and ends in ministry. Some of them notice that the widespread use of pragmatic means in the church leaves much to be desired—that we can be like politicians trying to dress up campaigns with "a little Jesus." I talk with them about

the end, the final goal and destiny of all things under the Lordship of Christ, who rules from a cross, and whose rule works through the power and wisdom of the cross.

Without a final destiny and conclusion, everything is simply up for grabs. Whoever has the slickest campaign ads, the most effective marketing strategy, and the longest donor list gets to determine the agenda—even for the church. What if the way is as Yoder concludes:

[It] does not mean renouncing effectiveness ... It means that in Jesus we have a clue to which kinds of causation, which kinds of community building, which kinds of conflict management, go with the grain of the cosmos, of which we know, as Caesar does not, that Jesus is both the Word (the inner logic of things) and the Lord (sitting at the right hand) that leads to the end is congruent with the One who is himself the End.”

What if the way is simply: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom”?